

FOOD AND  
THE PUBLIC  
SPHERE

# LUCY + JORGE ORTA



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# INTRODUCTION

## CONTEXT, PROCESS, CONSUMPTION AND VALUE

For the first time, this publication exclusively draws together the series of projects produced by Lucy + Jorge Orta since 1997 that use food as a means to examine and interrogate social issues surrounding production, distribution and waste. From the initial project *All in One Basket*, their *Food* series has evolved to now be centred on the ongoing artwork *70x7 The Meal* which draws from the ancestral: the ritual of dining together. It is important to understand that the Ortas’ practice revolves around two discrete yet interrelated processes: that of the establishment and engagement of a social dynamic—a gathering together of peoples and communities in public spaces—and the more formal objects, sculptures and installations that either accompany the meals, or are created independently to explore related subject areas, concepts, materials and aesthetics. As such they can be situated firmly within a discourse of social practice that has a strong contemporary currency.

These works or “Acts”, as the Ortas describe them, have unfolded as a series of public installations transforming a familiar and fundamental daily event—that of the human necessity to eat to sustain us—into something unique, to be remembered and re-enacted forever. As such they also acknowledge the legacies of other artists who sought to use food as a social instrument, both as a means to engender belonging or a collective focus, and as a way to define space publicly. It is through this that they join the lineage of artists wishing to establish a critique of broader sociopolitical and economic realities by generating debate and discussion, questioning value while reflecting on the very acts of production and consumption itself.

Born in Romania in 1930, Daniel Spoerri is a Swiss artist and writer best known for his ‘snare-pictures’, a type of assemblage in which he captures a group of objects, such as the remains of meals eaten by individuals, including plates, cutlery and glasses, all of which are fixed to the table or board and displayed on a wall. His first snare-picture, *Kichka’s Breakfast* (now in the collection in the Museum of Modern Art in New York), was created from his then girlfriend’s leftover breakfast. Developing beyond these works, food has remained a major theme of Spoerri’s practice, which he termed “Eat Art”, as a way to examine how we take in information, ‘digest’ and thereby understand things. Other contexts in which he has worked with food include his series of shop-bought canned food which he signed and rubber-stamped “Attention: Work of Art” in 1961, and a performance made in Paris called *Restaurant de la Galerie J*, 1963, in which he cooked on several evenings, with art critics playing the role of waiters to the visitors—a metaphor for their role in interpreting, guiding and creating meaning for audiences. Building upon these initiatives, a crucial project developed in the late 1960s where Spoerri opened the Restaurant Spoerri in Düsseldorf, later evolving by 1970 to become the Eat Art Gallery. Through this, he paved the way for a younger generation of artists who invite us to participate in the production of the artwork itself.

This social intertwining of art space with domestic ritual was taken even further in 1971 by FOOD, a restaurant founded by artists Caroline Goodden, Gordon Matta-Clark, Tina Girouard, Suzanne Harris and Rachel Lewy at 127 Prince Street in SoHo, New York City—an endeavour which sustained itself for three years before eventually closing due to financial difficulties in 1974. Before establishing this project, Goodden and Matta-Clark had already begun to host informal dinners at their

loft space and make sculptural celebrations with other artists and musicians involving food, such as the *Brooklyn Bridge Event*, 1971. As a logical extension, FOOD achieved its intention to evolve as an active and dynamic site, serving 41,272 customers in 1972. It was noted for using fresh and seasonal foods, a notionally countercultural idea for the time, and was one of the first New York restaurants to serve sushi and vegetarian meals — its menu containing further innovations including everything from ceviche to anchovy onion pie, canary pudding to used car stew. Many meals were given out for free or sold for much less than their actual ‘material’ value.

While undoubtedly acting as an artistic intervention into the urban setting, FOOD was also a thriving business with all the pressures of real-world existence and was designed to provide a community space to support and sustain the art community of downtown Manhattan. As such it describes a particular moment in conceptual practices revolving around certain individuals in New York during the 1970s. FOOD was a place where artists in SoHo, especially those who were later involved in *Avalanche* magazine and the Anarchitecture group, could meet and enjoy food together but also establish precedents of how art and the process of thinking and making might fulfil a social function and affect real change. This blurring between what might characteristically be defined as artwork, combined with a slice of everyday life, should be recognised as a key moment. Designed by Matta-Clark, FOOD’s kitchen was open and visible to the dining area, making the creation of every meal a performance, as if, according to Matta-Clark, “the whole event [was] a live ‘piece’”. These qualities can be considered ever more merged within the context of Matta-Clark’s broader work, in that the restaurant contained some of his first carpentry experiments leading toward his cutting pieces, additionally demonstrating his interest in recycled, reshaped and reworked materials. These were treated in much the same way as food is: from its initial cultivation, through to its raw state, to its processing into edible foodstuff. Such aspects are further revealed in the documentary film made by Matta-Clark with photographer Robert Frank that shows the ordinary workings of the place while also drawing attention to its materiality, the architectural details of the site, its open kitchen, its clientele eating and chatting; the everyday events and activities of the working environment.

The direct legacy of FOOD, with such integration into everyday life, can be seen in the practice of artists contemporary to the Ortas, including the Danish group Superflex, founded and directed by Jakob Fenger, Rasmus Nielsen and Bjonstjerne Christiansen. Since 1993 they have examined the dynamics and dependencies created by economic systems, while developing ‘tools’ to be used as an attempt to transform or propose solutions to real problems. A specific example of this is an ongoing collaboration first begun in 2003, where Superflex initiated a partnership with a guaraná farmers’ cooperative from Maués in the Brazilian Amazon, who had organised themselves to produce the Guaraná Power soft drink in opposition to corporate influence. A consortium of multinationals had exercised their monopoly on the purchase of seeds as raw material and had driven the price down, while the cost of their products to the consumer had risen. In order to draw attention to the struggle of the guaraná farmers, Superflex planned to take this relationship forward when they were invited to participate in the 27th São Paulo Biennial in 2006. However, the proposal met with resistance from the President of the Biennial Foundation, forbidding the display of the Guaraná Power soft drink and removing any mention of the name of the product—a ploy Superflex smartly sidestepped by taking the censorship further and striking out all text in the biennial reader related to themselves and the project. In addition, a huge Guaraná Power party was held the day before the biennial opening and the soft drink distributed in the park outside the biennial building during the opening. While their projects deliberately enact such socially conscious actions, they move beyond a modernist utopian impulse, rather intending to liberate, to produce individual and collective change, with the projects functioning as replicable models made available through the free distribution of instructions. Their work too can have a more playful suggestion of proposed change, not necessarily opposed to commercialism and globalisation but instead rendering economic structures visible. *Flooded McDonald’s*, first shown at the South London Gallery in 2010, comprises a film made in a set constructed as a life-size replica of the interior of a McDonald’s burger bar. Without any customers or staff present, it gradually floods with water, lifting up furniture while trays of food and drinks float around, electrics short-circuit and the space eventually becomes completely submerged.

FOOD can also be considered to have laid the foundation for what was to become labelled in the 1990s as ‘relational aesthetics’, a tendency identified by French art critic Nicolas Bourriaud as “a set of artistic practices which take as their theoretical and practical point of departure the whole of human relations and their social context, rather than an independent and private space”.<sup>1</sup> While having clear precedents in the earlier histories of community and participatory practices aligned with Conceptualism, contemporary artists such as Rirkrit Tiravanija have played a key role within this context. His work is essentially about bringing people together and about ideas of interaction and exchange, that, in and of itself, provides an interesting touchstone alongside projects by Lucy + Jorge Orta that began at a similar time. Beginning with *pad thai*, 1990, at the Paula Allen Gallery in New York, Tiravanija has

<sup>1</sup> Bourriaud, Nicolas, *Relational Aesthetics*, Dijon: Les presses du réel, 2002, p 113.

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consistently rejected traditional art objects altogether and instead cooked and served food for visitors over the course of many exhibitions. While projects blur the distance between artist and viewer—an untitled work at the Carnegie International exhibition in 1995 presented a wall text of written instructions for cooking Southeast Asian green curry which was then prepared for visitors, and his contribution to the Paris Triennale in 2012 transformed the main nave of the Grand Palais into a large-scale, twelve-hour banquet, composed of a single meal of Tom Kha soup—his work is more about the organics of social productivity and thus demonstrates an antipathy toward an easy categorisation of his practice under the label of ‘relational aesthetics’. Catalysing non-material, non-hierarchical social networks, Tiravanija ignores the prescribed division between art and life, constructing communal environments that offer an alternative venue for activity. When he does make objects, they are most often ephemera: commonplace objects used for cooking or camping serving as memories and designed to stimulate new interactions, a residue from one event ripe to be revisited or redeployed anew.

A clear indication of this broader intent of his practice is the ongoing project *The Land* (begun in 1998), a collaborative artistic, architectural and environmental recovery project in San Pa Tong, Thailand, initiated anonymously and without the concept of ownership. The land was to be cultivated as an open space, though as a place of, and for, community, social engagement, discussion and experimentation. Here an ever developing list of residents and artists (including students from the University of Chiang Mai, Superflex, Prachya Phintong, Tobias Rehberger, Kamin Lertchaiprasert, Atelier van Lieshout and Mit Jai Inn) have been welcomed to use a plot of land as a laboratory for development, encompassing activities such as cultivating rice, building sustainable houses or channelling solar power. While a specific context informs the nature of projects that evolve there, it chimes in part with the collective environment founded by Lucy + Jorge Orta in 2000 at Les Moulins, a complex of former mills and thriving paper industry situated along an 8-kilometre stretch of the Grand Morin valley at Boissy-le-Châtel, France. Seen as an extension of their practice, the site is ripe with potential to evolve projects that might host models for change.

While the very act of preparing produce, cooking and eating, and the social dynamic that is established through these types of performative activities, is one aspect of the Ortas’ work, the other side is the objects and various accoutrements that accompany the events. Sculptural qualities, as noted earlier, were present in FOOD and integrated into the very fabric of its space. This was extended further by ideas put forward by Goodden that soup could be used for painting, for example, or in the meal using marrow by Matta-Clark, where the bones were cleaned and used to create necklaces for the diner to wear after eating. The physicality of this exchange continues the process of transformation present in the act of consumption itself.

Perhaps more closely tied to the Ortas and in some way reflecting the strong design aesthetic of the settings for the various iterations of *70x7 The Meal*, while simultaneously encompassing the celebratory nature of a symbolic event, is *The Dinner Party*, an epic installation by feminist artist Judy Chicago produced from 1974 to 1979. While contentious for a variety of reasons across a number of quarters, it is nonetheless a piece of considerable undertaking, comprising an immense, open triangular table covered in fine cloth resting on a porcelain floor of 2,304 hand-cast, gilded and lustred tiles, on which are inscribed the names of 999 important women. The table itself is set with thirty-nine unique place settings, thirteen on each side, each commemorating a goddess, historical figure or important woman, including figures such as Virginia Woolf, Sojourner Truth and Eleanor of Aquitaine. As a collaborative work, again a parallel to the Ortas’ approach, it employs a range of carefully crafted media, from ceramics and china painting to various textile techniques, honouring the history, traditions and achievements of women in Western civilisation.

Such notions of value should also be considered within an analysis and appreciation of Lucy + Jorge Orta’s *Food* series beyond material presence. This may take many forms outside of the physical qualities present in the actual forms of utensils and vessels, extending into a conceptual questioning regarding how worth becomes inscribed in an object, be it through intrinsic material values or, just as importantly, through the very partnerships and allegiances that might be formed through the act of participation with, and use of, these objects.

Akin to this, we might consider Italian artist Cesare Pietroiusti, who is principally concerned with questioning perceived worth, where and how this resides in objects and forms, the logics of economy and consumption, as well as problematic and paradoxical situations that are hidden in common relationships and in ordinary daily acts. Projects such as *Eating Money*, 2005, quite literally bring into focus questions concerning a notional transformation through the process of ingestion and evacuation involving the artist’s body. Other works such as *Enriching Food*, 2007, equally and pointedly share the politicised aspect with the Ortas’ *All in One Basket*, while similarly delineating a space that is as celebratory as it is socially dynamic. Consisting of a mammoth 24-hour stint, the artist took over Café Ikon as head chef at Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, UK, and offered guests a range of Italian food from a specially devised menu. When they had finished their meals, diners received the equivalent value of the various dishes they had ordered in cash, visibly and tangibly revealing what had actually been consumed while placed into a different register.



Other young artists sit parallel in their occupation of a space that draws upon the legacy of FOOD while also employing ephemeral events as a means to develop a social critique. Based in Sydney, Australia, Keg de Souza is an interdisciplinary, self-described “anarchitect” who works on community-driven, large-scale interventions. Typical projects involve the creation of inflatable structures to provide and define a prototype space, in which issues such as food security, spatial politics and community building are discussed, often over themed meals. As with *70x7 The Meal*, in de Souza’s wider practice there is a strong focus on community participation and collective conversation, the ensuing exchange often intrinsically linked to the situated circumstances in which it is created. In many ways such events enter into the folklore of a place; individual participants’ recollections and memories forming part of the ongoing repercussions and having the potential to trigger transformation.

The ongoing propositions by Lucy + Jorge Orta fit within a lineage of discourse and practice shared with historical precedents and contemporary peers. As is clear from their initial project in 1997, where the artists hosted an open-air buffet in one of the busiest central shopping districts in Paris, Les Halles, they are consistently engaging with ways and means to draw attention to significant global subjects. Made with discarded fruit from nearby markets, this project targeted issues that can be identified as part of a growing engagement of artists with topics such as consumer food waste and the inequalities of global food distribution, within the broader set of concerns governing production, consumption and value. These are the moments that provide potential pressure points to address what can seem to be daily news items, be it information of yet more over-production or farmers paid to reduce output, while in other parts of the world conflict or climate change creates failed harvests. If we consider our society as one becoming ever more fractured, or that there is an increasing sense of disenfranchisement with large-scale politics, then specific, issue-led work becomes ever more pertinent. As with food, so too the Ortas engage with other related themes such as environmental politics and mobility of peoples, with ongoing projects like *Antarctica*, or shelter and habitat, via projects such as *Refuge Wear*. Yet this is not rooted merely in an exclusive or idealistic attempt to affect a shift in consensus. What the Ortas provide in *Food* and other projects is a questioning that reflects this urgency in real-world ideas and issues. While encompassing process and materiality that is at once both poetic and sharply determined, their Acts suggest possible changes in policy or thinking, thereby revealing ways and means that might contribute to the broader discussion challenging the status quo.

## BIOGRAPHY

**Nigel Prince has been Executive Director of the Contemporary Art Gallery, Vancouver since 2011. He has overseen a complete reinvigoration of the organisation across its programming and operations, whereby CAG is now understood as one of Canada’s premier arts institutions. While in Canada he has served as a jury member on a number of national awards including the Hnatyshyn Foundation Visual Arts Awards, RBC Canadian Painting Award, and the Canadian Art Foundation Writing Prize, Toronto.**

**Prior to this he was Curator at Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, UK, where he was responsible for an international programme, making solo exhibitions and publications with artists including Arturo Herrera, Donald Judd, Olafur Eliasson, Susan Collis, Martin Boyce, Shahzia Sikander, Ryan Gander, Victor Man, Marcel Dzama, Steven Shearer and Susan Philipsz amongst many others. His exhibition of paintings and drawings by Cuban artist Carmen Herrera in 2009 was critically heralded as the “discovery of the decade” by the *Guardian/Observer* and *The New York Times*.**

**He has also worked as an independent curator and writer. Exhibitions include: *Itself*, Transmission Gallery, Glasgow; *In the Midst of Things*, Bournville, Birmingham; *Jim Isermann*, Camden Arts Centre, London; *Andrea Zittel, A–Z Cellular Compartment Units*, The Mailbox, Birmingham, and *Andrea Rosen*, New York; *Heather & Ivan Morison...*, IPS, Birmingham and national tour; *Nina Katchadourian, Accent Elimination*, as part of *The Genealogy of the Supermarket and Other New Works*, Sara Meltzer Gallery, New York.**

# FOOD

## EXTRACT OF A CONVERSATION BETWEEN HOU HANRU AND LUCY + JORGE ORTA

HHR

Your food projects have evolved over the years in what you have termed “Acts”, beginning with *All in One Basket*, 1997, can you give a few examples of the following Acts and how these have led to the most recent series *70x7 The Meal*, 2000?

L+JO

Each Act is part of an evolving process that becomes participative, more complex and embedded with the possibilities and collaborations that each locale allows. For the first Act of our food projects *All in One Basket*, we hosted an open-

air buffet in one of the busiest central shopping districts of Paris, Les Halles, made with discarded fruit salvaged from Parisian fruit and vegetable markets. A former farmers’ market, Les Halles was delocalised in the 1970s, and its site was handed over to real-estate developers, who built a horrific underground shopping mall. *All in One Basket* points a finger at local consumer waste and the inequalities of global food distribution. Using the fruit and vegetable market as an example of a growing urban phenomenon, we were able to generate debate around the broader subject. With more than 300 kilograms of ripe produce that we had gleaned from the local markets, our professional partner, the famous Parisian pâtissier Stohrer, arduously cooked a variety of sweet dishes.

Samples of jams, jellies, and puddings were available to taste for free, and visitors could buy souvenir editions of our bottled and labelled preserves. During the course of the day, thousands of people stopped by, including members of the art community, shoppers, children, homeless people, students, and immigrants. In the adjacent gallery of Saint-Eustache, we set up an installation of artefacts constructed from wooden fruit crates, and displayed our homemade preserves with photographs of mounds of discarded market produce. The installation also included *Storage Units*, a series of trolleys with baskets symbolising the collecting of the produce, which were outfitted with a sound system playing the audio recordings of interviews with the community of gleaners at the weekly markets.

Two years later, we were able to stage the second Act, *HortiRecycling Enterprise*, 1999, in Vienna thanks to the historical context of the construction of the Wiener Secession, founded in 1897 by artists Gustav Klimt, Koloman Moser, Josef Hoffmann, Joseph Maria Olbrich, Max Kurzweil, Otto Wagner and others. These artists objected to the conservatism of the Vienna Künstlerhaus, with its orientation toward historicism, and were concerned with exploring the possibilities of art outside the confines of academic tradition. The Secession Building could be considered the icon of the movement, and above its entrance is the phrase, “To every age its art and to art its freedom”. We took advantage of this history, the proximity of the fruit and vegetable Naschmarkt opposite the gallery, and the energetic Secession curators who carry on the legacy of the Viennese manifesto.

Instead of discarding their overripe fruit and vegetables, the market vendors were given ‘Collect Units’—brightly coloured, silkscreen-printed bags—to fill with rejected produce throughout the day. We collected the bags of fruit and vegetables using the ‘Processing Units’—mobile kitchens with integrated shopping carts, sinks, hotplates and freezers. The ripe produce was cleaned, chopped and cooked by the Viennese chef Han Staud on location in the market. We distributed the fresh delicacies to encourage the public to take up these kinds of sustainable initiatives.

In the Wiener Secession’s first-floor gallery, we set up a second working kitchen complete with a ‘Collect Unit Pulley’, a wooden winch reminiscent of the Medieval pulley systems used to haul groceries in baskets to the upper floors of tall buildings. Using this device, market produce was delivered to the gallery, cleaned, cooked and then bottled or frozen in dainty portions ready for distribution.

This pilot action took place in both the market and the gallery, illustrating the multiple possibilities of a recycling enterprise and at the same time bringing together an art institution, the street and the different communities involved.

**HHR** In many of your works, in particular the food projects, your role is both artist and project manager: you mobilise the institution (taking it beyond its established limit and out of the art context), involve the community, communicate the project and encourage wide participation. To what extent do you consider your work to be an artistic project versus a sociological one? How do you define your work?

**L + JO** For us they are one of the same, both creative and sociological, linked and inseparable. For the last decade we have been looking for formats for our work that enable interaction and foster responses to the real challenges and needs of local communities. After *All in One Basket* and *HortiRecycling Enterprise*, *70x7 The Meal* was the natural next step in our research—from food collecting and recycling, to the fabrication of culinary objects and artefacts, to the actual ritual of dining.

For the *70x7 The Meal* series, we invite a small number of guests to become part of an endless banquet, and in turn ask them to invite other people, so the act of creating the event happens through the chain of human interaction. We are merely triggers in that process, or enablers. The artwork becomes almost invisible, taking the form of our most cherished rituals; it mimics the essential human needs to eat and to unite. For each meal we try and create a set of bespoke artefacts, such as a hand-printed tablecloth or Royal Limoges porcelain plates, designed in our studio. These become the binding elements of each meal, leaving a trace that something unusual has brought these guests together. However, we ensure that these clues remain discreet, so as not to incite a ‘fear of art’; instead, they act as catalysts, stimulating encounters to blossom naturally. By setting the meals in an urban space, we return to the need for spontaneous general assemblies around specific subjects, bringing people together to converse, reconcile and reflect, with the potentiality of an artwork that is active in the heart of a community. By blurring the boundaries between an art project and a real-life situation, our goal is to incorporate people as active participants, giving them a sense of belonging and empowering communities with a sense of civic responsibility. Each meal changes the world, if only in a small way.

**HHR** This type of project reminds us of past experimental art, in particular Joseph Beuys’ concept of ‘social sculpture’. His work is based on a personal belief that creativity is essential and part of human nature. Beuys argued that everyone was an artist. However, his way of communicating this message resembled a priest preaching the truth to people. Your practice is perhaps more open and participatory. How do you initiate this process artistically, and to what extent can you still call this artistic or creative?

**L + JO** We pursue the idea of art as a catalyst for social change, building on Beuys’ legacy. We believe that the individual creative potential of people no longer needs to be proved—it needs to be fully recognised and channelled into initiatives that will mobilise an even wider range of members of the community, be they street vendors, passers-by, museum curators or visitors. These individual initiatives—in the form of art actions, performances or whatever—are the ingredients to catalyse social change. Throughout our practice we have been moved by various problems our society is facing—solitude, hunger, homelessness, water shortages, climate change, migration—and we create poetic schemas to attempt to tackle these problems. By developing long-term research strategies over a minimum ten-year life span that unfold in a series of Acts, we can actually begin to understand and find solutions for ecological, political, and humanitarian issues. By activating debate and discussion, we aim to change people’s attitudes or habits, and thus get closer to the seeds of real change, which can even lead to the modification of legislation. It’s not the work of art, but a process—through a chain reaction of events with the participation of people—that can actually make this happen.

Once again, we’re exploring the extreme limits of art, the periphery, even if it means leaving the artistic sphere altogether, without worrying about whether our activities fit into actual artistic categories or criteria or not. Our aim is to explore and open up new ways of moving forward.

**HHR** How do you shift your *70x7 The Meal* practice to specific contexts and venues?

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**L + JO** Sometimes the meal settings are small, so we can focus on specific issues in intimate settings. The larger events for thousands of people allow for greater public participation. The venues range from galleries to restaurants, historic buildings, streets and open-air parks. For example, *Act XXIII* took place in the Barbican in London, on the occasion of my survey exhibition in The Curve gallery in 2005. The Curve was the ideal setting for piloting *Lunch with Lucy*, a live panel discussion and gastronomic encounter for seven food specialists, developed with the education team at the Barbican and broadcast via media channels such as YouTube. The panellists were Harriet Lamb, Director of the Fairtrade Foundation, which develops products, licenses brands and raises awareness of issues surrounding fair trade; Tim Lang, professor of food policy at City University London who advises food and public health sectors both nationally and internationally; Lucy Stockton-Smith, an artist who designs and builds geodesic ecology domes in schools to promote an educational approach to biodiversity; Wendy Fogarty, the International Councillor for Slow Food UK, an association that promotes food and wine culture and also defends food and agricultural biodiversity worldwide; Dr Peter Barham, reader in physics at Bristol University, the author of *The Science of Cooking*, and a collaborator with chef Heston Blumenthal in the development of molecular gastronomy; and Allegra McEvedy, the chef and founder of Leon, the United Kingdom’s first fast-food chain to feature fresh, organic and seasonal produce. The seventh guest and chair of the session was John Slyce, a London-based art critic and historian. *Lunch with Lucy* was designed to function as a platform to raise awareness, provoke insight, question practices in the food industry, and bridge the gap between the arts and society.

The twenty-ninth dining experience was held in the historical Savoy palace of Venaria Reale, outside the city of Turin in Italy. It was our first collaboration with the Fondazione Slow Food per la Biodiversità Onlus, with the aim to support the project Cooperativa Cauqueva in Argentina and to protect the production of the Andean potato, a fundamental foodstuff and financial resource for the rural Argentinean population. We invited 147 guests to dine on the most basic of dishes: soup. Together with chef Alfredo Russo from the restaurant Dolce Stil Novo, we chose soup as a symbol and common denominator, and it was served throughout the meal, from the main course to the dessert. This sustainable dish brings together populations and cultures of every continent, and can have spectacular colours: green vegetables, black beans, red tomatoes, orange pumpkins, white garlic and onions. In contrast with the ornate setting of the palace, we created a huge vegetable kitchen for a live performance at the head of the dining table, where we cleaned and chopped mountains of organic vegetables for each of the guests to take home in a hand-printed calico bag. A Royal Limoges porcelain plate edition designed especially for the occasion celebrated the theme by depicting delicately drawn vegetables and a recipe for potato soup, to be cooked using the vegetables we prepared.

Our fiftieth act—which covers several miles of streets starting from Tate Modern and running across the Millennium Bridge to Guildhall, the historical centre of London—hasn’t yet been realised, but from past experience, and with our 70x7 multiplication strategy, we know that it is possible to unite several thousand people. All we need now is a good pretext to gather the crowds, but the right occasion hasn’t quite arisen yet!

**HHR** It seems that the key to the success of these events is their partnerships and collaborations, so how do you go about determining the occasion for an event?

**L + JO** There are events that need quick, urgent attention, and then there are issues that may need to be repeated and drawn out over several meals, to sustain the subject in depth. As a reaction to the invasion of Iraq in 2003, we decided to stage *Act XX* at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris. We invited 490 people—diplomats, representatives from the cultural sector, artists, and media representatives—to dine on bowls of rice (*Un Bol de Riz pour la Paix*) at an immense table. Our choice of the UNESCO headquarters as a setting for the meal was not anodyne. Human rights and fundamental freedoms were being violated, and we needed a venue to carry the weight of our discussions, as well as a place we knew would be frequented by decision-makers in the process of promoting peace and security.

In 2007, the Albion gallery in London hosted our first charity dinner—*70x7 The Meal Act XXVII*, also on the subject of the Iraq conflict—to close the exhibition The Politics of Fear. Here we addressed the themes of forced migration and torture, and the proceeds of the event were donated to the Medical Foundation for the Care of Victims of Torture. We also highlighted the work of charities, including Forward Thinking, Asylum Aid, Information Centre about Asylum and Refugees, and Bail for Immigration Detainees. In keeping with the concept of *70x7 The Meal*, the guest list was composed of seven groups of seven people: artists, media representatives, charities, collectors, curators, philanthropists, and political and legal figures. We invited an additional fifty people, for a total of ninety-nine—the Chinese symbol for infinity. This Act was also the first time the limited-edition Royal Limoges porcelain plates were designed by collaborating artists: Reza Aramesh, Xu Bing, Shilpa Gupta, Kendell Geers, Rashid Rana, and Avishek Sen.

70x7 *The Meal Act XXVIII* at the Ephrussi de Rothschild Villa in Monaco was a small private dinner in the presence of His Serene Highness, The Sovereign Prince of Monaco. For this occasion, forty-nine guests—avid supporters of the arts, the environment and education, with a specific interest in climate change—were invited to inaugurate the Art for the Environment initiative, a partnership formed between the Natural World Museum and the United Nations Environment Programme in 2008. Our common goals were to use the universal language of art as a catalyst to unite people in action and thought and to empower individuals, communities and leaders to focus on environmental values across social, economic and political realms.

**HHR** You mentioned something very interesting earlier: legislation. How can art influence legislative change and be a more effective channel for inciting social responsibility?

**LO** It's the research process, followed by hundreds of collective actions and manifestations in the public sphere—through what has been called the 'butterfly effect'—that will raise awareness and eventually lead to changes in legislation. 70x7 *The Meal* is just one of the methods we use. Perhaps this is how Beuys' idea of social sculpture can take form and become an integrated part of daily life.

**HHR** So, do you expect one day to get more directly involved in the political system?

**L+JO** No, definitely not, and we have both been asked! But, we are developing a new cultural project, *Les Moulins*, which will regenerate a former industrial complex that has ceased activity in a rural region of exceptional beauty, the Brie, in the Seine-et-Marne area of France. We have already begun renovating four important historical industrial buildings along an 8-kilometre stretch of the Grand Morin river—La Laiterie (The Dairy); and three paper mills, Moulin La Vacherie, Moulin de Boissy and Moulin Sainte-Marie—to transform them into creative laboratories dedicated to artistic research and production. Inspired by the historical and environmental context of the surrounding Grand Morin river valley, and more specifically by the industrial heritage of the paper mills, the birthplace of paper in France. *Les Moulins* will play host to studios and residencies for international artists and researchers from the domains of contemporary visual arts and ecological science to discuss, develop, create and present artistic projects through a programme of collaborative activities.

Our artistic practice is our life's work. There is still too much ground to be covered and too many silent voices that need to be heard. The strength of art is its independence.

BIOGRAPHY

Hou Hanru is a Chinese art curator and critic. He is Artistic Director of the MAXXI in Rome, Italy.

Hou graduated from the Central Academy of Fine Arts in Beijing and moved to Paris in 1990. He lived in France for sixteen years before moving to the United States in 2006. He worked at San Francisco Art Institute as Director of Exhibitions and Public Programs and Chair of Exhibition and Museum Studies from 2006 to 2012.

He has curated numerous exhibitions, including Cities On The Move (1997–2000), Shanghai Biennale (2000), Gwangju Biennale (2002), Venice Biennale (French Pavilion, 1999; Z.O.U. — Zone Of Urgency, 2003; Chinese Pavilion, 2007), Nuit Blanche (Paris, 2004), the 2nd Guangzhou Triennial (2005), the 2nd Tirana Biennial (2005), the 10th Istanbul Biennial (2007), Global Multitude (Luxembourg, 2007), Trans(cient) City (Luxembourg, 2007), EV+A (Limerick, 2008), The Spectacle of the Everyday, the 10th Lyon Biennale (Lyon, 2009), the 5th Auckland Triennial (Auckland, New Zealand, 2013).

He has been consultant and adviser in many international institutions including Walker Art Center (Minneapolis), Solomon R Guggenheim Museum (New York), Kumamoto Museum of Contemporary Art (Kumamoto, Japan), De Appel Foundation (Amsterdam), Rockbund Art Museum (Shanghai), Times Museum (Guangzhou), Today Art Museum (Beijing), Power Station of Art (Shanghai), Deutsche Bank Collection (Frankfurt), Kadist Art Foundation (San Francisco/Paris) and Asia Art Archive (Hong Kong). He has served in juries of many international awards including the Hugo Boss Prize (Guggenheim Museum), Chinese Contemporary Art Award (Beijing), Ars Fennica (Helsinki), Credit Suisse/Today Art Award (Today Art Museum, Beijing) and Hugo Boss Prize China (Rockbund Art Museum, Shanghai).

He has also taught and lectured in various artistic and educational institutions including Rijksakademie van beeldende kunsten (Amsterdam), HISK (Antwerp /Ghent), and numerous universities and museums across the world.



# 70x7 THE MEAL

The inspiration behind Lucy + Jorge's time-based artwork *70x7 The Meal* is the work of Padre Rafael Garcia Herreros (Colombia, 1909–1992), who initiated a series of charity banquets to generate funds for a major urban social development programme entitled *El Minuto de Dios*. His mission was to radically transform one of the most abandoned zones of the city of Bogotá into a thriving community. Through the hugely successful fundraising banquets he was able to oversee the redevelopment of a whole district of family housing with gardens, schools, a theatre, small factories, a university and a contemporary art museum. On discovering Padre Rafael's lifelong work, Lucy + Jorge Orta imagined a secular interpretation of the idea—*70x7 The Meal*—which would become one of their most successful visual manifestations of the capacity for transformation that art can trigger across communities, cultures and continents.

The concept for *70x7 The Meal* is inspired by the biblical reference to infinity (Luke 17:4), as well as symbolic meanings for the number seven across cultures and religions. As a unifying metaphor for the series, *70x7 The Meal* unfolds through new "Acts" or instalments that bring together a huge diversity of people in uncommon settings through the ritual of eating. In each new instance, the symbol 70x7 functions as a networking device whereby seven guests invite seven, who invite seven, *ad infinitum*.

Each Act of the meal is created specifically for a location and developed together with local stakeholders, often accompanied by a comprehensive programme of social engagement. Meals can become picnics, open-air luncheons, dinners, charity fundraisers or exquisite banquets, and they have been presented in galleries, museums and public spaces. Food eaten can be locally sourced, menus prepared by star chefs, or the act of dining together can quite simply be a pot-luck gathering for all and sundry. The specificity of each Act is the artists' limited edition of Royal Limoges porcelain plates; a precious artwork that perdures the ephemeral happening, a relational object that connects the act of dining with the emotion of being part of something larger and long-lasting.

Since the first Act over fifteen years ago, Lucy + Jorge Orta have presented over forty variations of the meal. The pretext of eating together, the catalytic 70x7 engagement strategy, the unusual settings and the beautiful artworks adorning each table have united thousands of people from all walks of life in different parts of the world, to meet together and share dialogue in a common space around individual themes that affect our local and global communities.

*À table! ...*





1997

**ALL IN ONE BASKET — BUFFET ACT I**

EXHIBITION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROJECT, GALERIE SAINT-EUSTACHE, LES HALLES, PARIS, FRANCE



Lucy + Jorge Orta's fascination with food was inspired by the 1996 French farmers' protest against European free market legislation, which authorised the importation of low-cost agricultural produce from neighbouring European countries. French farmers, fearing their livelihoods in jeopardy, dumped their entire harvest—tonnes and tonnes of fruit and vegetables—onto the highways to draw attention to their plight. Shocked by the mountains of edible wasted food and the desperate plight of the farmers, Lucy + Jorge Orta went on weekly gleaning expeditions to the Parisian open-air markets to collect the overripe produce that was discarded onto the streets at the end of each market. Not only did they collect hundreds of kilos of ripe produce every week, which they cooked and preserved to make jam reliquaries, but they interviewed the communities of gleaners to create an audio archive of the process, which was later incorporated into their objects. A year later, curator Jérôme Sans invited the artists to exhibit their work at the Galerie Saint-Eustache, situated in the heart of the former market district of Les Halles. For the opening of *Dans le Même Panier* (*All in One Basket*), the artists collected a staggering 300 kilos of discarded fruit, which they gave to the famous Parisian chef-pâtissier Stohrer, who set up an open-air kitchen and offered free taster delicacies to passers-by. The exhibition and buffet of waste food provided a spontaneous civic forum to provoke discussions and bring attention to broader issues around food production, distribution and waste.















## HORTIRECYCLING — RECYCLING ENTERPRISE ACT II

EXHIBITION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROJECT, WIENER SECESSION,  
VIENNA, AUSTRIA

**S**purred on by the stimulating public responses to *All in One Basket — Buffet Act I*, *HortiRecycling Enterprise* explores a simple citizen initiative for food recycling and distribution. Commissioned by Vienna's avant-garde exhibition venue, the Wiener Secession, *Act II* draws from the proximity of the Naschmarkt opposite the gallery, where it was possible for Lucy + Jorge Orta to pilot their enterprise. Having concluded that great amounts of edible waste could be avoided if it was not discarded onto the dirty streets, the artists distributed 'Collect Units' to vendors at the market, thus short-circuiting a problem of hygiene. During the day a team collected the brightly coloured silkscreen-printed bags overflowing with rejected produce with the aid of the 'Processing Units'. These mobile kitchens with integrated shopping carts, sinks, hotplates and freezers enabled the rapid conditioning of the ripe produce, where it was washed, chopped and cooked on location with the help of the famous Viennese chef, Han Staud. Freshly prepared delicacies were offered to the general public in exchange for discussions about sustainable initiatives. Once the market closed, *HortiRecycling Enterprise* was transferred to the Wiener Secession where a wooden winch, reminiscent of the Medieval pulley systems, hauled more bags of groceries to the upper floor galleries. Market produce was prepared and bottled or frozen in dainty portions ready for re-distribution to gallery visitors. This pilot action linked market commerce and gallery, art and life, building links with communities across the city to promote an awareness of waste and to drive new recycling initiatives.

























2000 | **70x7 The Meal Act III**, Innsbruck  
Royal Limoges porcelain plates, three-  
colour enamel, edition of 490 plates, dated  
and signed by the artist | 27 cm diameter  
Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta



2000 | **Edition of seventy beechwood boxes containing seven Royal Limoges porcelain plates | 33x33x14 cm | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta and Kunstraum Innsbruck, Austria |**



2000

## 70X7 THE MEAL ACT III, INNSBRUCK

**EXTENDING TABLE SET FOR FOURTEEN GUESTS, ROYAL LIMOGES  
PORCELAIN PLATES (ED 490), SILKSCREEN-PRINTED TABLE RUNNER  
(ED 32X2.5M)**

For the exhibition *The Invisible Touch*, curated by Maia Damianovic at the Kunstraum gallery in Innsbruck, Lucy + Jorge Orta imagined their third food-related project and the first rendition of *70x7 The Meal*. This meal would set in motion a process that would unfold over the years and bring together tens of thousands of people from all walks of life, to take part in the ritual of dining and stimulate discussions on issues affecting our local and global communities. In the gallery, the artists installed an extending table set for fourteen guests, complete with exquisite setting of Royal Limoges porcelain plates and a silkscreen-printed table runner. The central motif of their first edition of Royal Limoges porcelain was the artichoke with a heart enveloped in endless leaves, the artists' recurring symbol of empathy and sharing. The installation served as the focus for two dinners uniting Innsbruck stakeholders affected by local food policies. The first meal for fourteen guests, included organic farmers, politicians, journalists and cultural actors, who dined on a menu of surplus local organic produce. To perpetuate the discussions, seven of these guests invited seven more, totalling forty-nine guests, who then dined on a menu of surplus imported produce. The porcelain plates were taken home by each of the guests and during the exhibition sets of seven plates packaged in beechwood cases, hand-crafted by local Tyrol carpenters, were sold to the visitors to encourage discussions beyond the gallery walls, embodying the playful concept of *70x7*: seven guests invite seven, *ad infinitum*.



**70X7 THE MEAL ACT IV, DIEUZE**

TABLE SETTING FOR 3,000 GUESTS, ROYAL LIMOGES PORCELAIN PLATES  
(TWO EDITIONS OF ED 750), SILKSCREEN TABLE RUNNER (ED 500 M)



Dieuze, a small agricultural town in the north-east of France was the setting for the fourth Act of *70x7 The Meal*. Initiated by the director of the local youth association, sensing a growing fragmentation of the population, he called upon Lucy + Jorge Orta with the idea of an open-air meal. Taking on the challenge, Lucy + Jorge Orta used the 70x7 strategy to connect with members of the community including service men, farmers, ex-miners, old-age pensioners, families and children. They asked every member to participate in the creation of a 'Manifesto for the Millennium', elements of which were later incorporated into artworks that would adorn the tables. A year later, invitations for the open-air meal were sent out to the entire population of 3,000 and, as internet was not widely used at that time, traditional methods of door-to-door, word-of-mouth, municipal posters, radio, and newspaper advertisements were used. On the day, Dieuze streets were closed and an immense table, half-a-kilometre long, stretched the length of the main road from the abandoned salt mine to the Town Hall. The regional arts centre La Synagogue de Delme commissioned the limited edition of Royal Limoges porcelain plates and a bright red, 47 hand-printed silkscreen table runner, to complete the extraordinary installation. The resounding impact of the meal was measured by the acquisition of the Royal Limoges porcelain plates, with over 750 plates sold on the day. The plate became the prized memento—the relational object—and proof of the need to reconnect and forge a collective identity despite the rising tensions.





2000 | 70x7 The Meal Act IV, Dieuze | Royal Limoges porcelain plates, three-colour enamel, edition of 700 plates, dated and signed by the artist | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta



2000 | 70x7 The Meal Act IV, Dieuze | Royal Limoges porcelain plates, three-colour enamel, edition of 700 plates, dated and signed by the artist | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta







2001 | **70X7 THE MEAL ACT VIII,  
ASPEN, COLORADO**  
OPEN-AIR TABLE SETTING FOR 448 GUESTS, VARIOUS EDITIONS  
OF ROYAL LIMOGES PLATES ON LOAN



Under the heading “Design, what matters now?”, Lucy + Jorge Orta were invited to create an installation for the 448 guests and delegates attending the 51st International Aspen Design Conference, held annually at the mountain resort in Colorado, USA. The table was decked with different editions of Royal Limoges plates to stimulate discussions around new ethical practices in art and design.

## 70X7 THE MEAL





LUCY+JORGE ORTA



70X7 THE MEAL



2001 | **70X7 THE MEAL ACT XII, AMIENS**  
OPEN-AIR PICNIC, SILKSCREEN-PRINTED RUNNER (ED 1,500 M)

Commissioned by the Musée de Picardie, the twelfth Act of *70x7 The Meal* took the form of an open-air picnic in the French city of Amiens in celebration of the Year of Mexico. The artists created a 1,500-metre picnic cloth, which was laid along the river banks in the Parc de Beauvillé. The cloth was designed into sections to be cut and taken home at the end of the meal.







- 1 | 2000 | *70x7 The Meal Act III*, Innsbruck | Edition of seventy beechwood boxes containing seven Royal Limoges porcelain plates | 33x33x14 cm | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta and Kunstraum Innsbruck, Austria |
- 2, 3 | 2000 | *70x7 The Meal Act IV*, Dieuze | Royal Limoges porcelain plates, three-colour enamel, edition of 700 plates, dated and signed by the artist | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta |
- 4 | 2000 | *70x7 The Meal Act III*, Innsbruck | Royal Limoges porcelain plates, three-colour enamel, edition of 490 plates, dated and signed by the artist | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta |
- 5 | 2001 | *70x7 The Meal Acts V–VII*, Mexico City | Royal Limoges porcelain plates, gold and platinum enamels, edition of 490 plates, dated and signed by the artist | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta |
- 6 | 2001 | *70x7 The Meal Act X*, Napa Valley | Royal Limoges porcelain plates, four-colour enamel, edition of 210 plates, dated and signed by the artist | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta |
- 7 | 2001 | *70x7 The Meal Act XI*, Antwerp | Royal Limoges porcelain plates, three-colour enamel, edition of 210 plates, dated and signed by the artist, 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta |
- 8 | 2001 | *70x7 The Meal Act XIII*, Colchester | Royal Limoges porcelain plates, four-colour enamel, edition of 210 plates, dated and signed by the artist | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta |
- 9 | 2001 | *70x7 The Meal Act IX*, Cologne | Royal Limoges porcelain plates, four-colour enamel, edition of 210 plates, dated and signed by the artist | 27 cm diameter |
- 10–16 | 2002 | *70x7 The Meal Act XVIII*, Graz | Royal Limoges porcelain plates, offset enamel, edition of thirty-five boxes containing seven plates each with different design on reverse side, dated and signed by artist | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta and Sterischer Herbst Graz |
- 17 | 2002 | *70x7 The Meal Act XVI*, Bolzano | Royal Limoges porcelain plates, enamel and platinum, edition of 490 plates, dated and signed by the artist | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta |
- 18 | 2002 | *70x7 The Meal Act XVII*, Toulouse | Royal Limoges porcelain plates, four-colour enamel, edition of 350 plates, dated and signed by the artist | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta |
- 19–24 | 2002 | *70x7 The Meal Act XIX*, Eindhoven | Royal Limoges porcelain plates, offset enamel, edition of thirty-five boxes containing seven plates each with different design on reverse side, dated and signed by artist | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta and the Design Academy Eindhoven |



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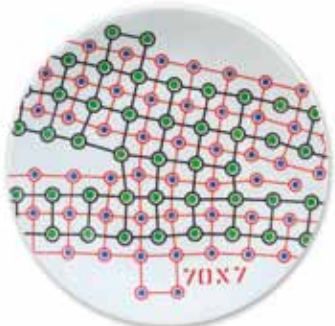
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25 | 2002 | *70x7 The Meal Act XIX*, Eindhoven | Royal Limoges porcelain plates, offset enamel, edition of thirty-five boxes containing seven plates each with different design on reverse side, dated and signed by artist | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta and the Design Academy Eindhoven |

26 | 2003 | *70x7 The Meal Act XX*, UNESCO, Paris | Royal Limoges porcelain plates, enamel and platinum, edition of 210 plates, dated and signed by the artist | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta and Sterischer Herbst Graz |

27 | 2005 | *70x7 The Meal Act XXI*, Neude Square, Utrecht | Royal Limoges porcelain plate, enamel and platinum, edition of 210 plates, dated and signed by the artist, 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta |

28 | 2005 | *70x7 The Meal Act XXII*, SUPER! Z33, Hasselt | Royal Limoges porcelain plate, three-colour enamel, edition of 210 plates, dated and signed by the artist | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta |

29 | 2005 | *70x7 The Meal Act XXIII*, The Curve, Barbican, London | Royal Limoges porcelain plate, enamel and platinum, edition of 210 plates, dated and signed by the artist | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta |

30–36 | 2006 | *70x7 The Meal Act XXIV*, ArtAids Fundació Joan Miró | Royal Limoges porcelain plate, thirteen-colour enamel, edition of 150 of seven designs, dated and signed by the artist | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta and ArtAids |

37, 38 | 2006 | *70x7 The Meal Act XXV*, Open House, London | Royal Limoges porcelain plate, twelve-colour enamel, edition of 150 plates, dated and signed by the artist | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta |

39–45 | 2007 | *70x7 The Meal Act XXVII*, Albion, London | Royal Limoges porcelain plate, offset enamel, edition of 100 plates, dated and signed by Reza Aramesh | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta, Avishek Sen, Kendell Geers, Xu Bing, Shilpa Gupta, Rashid Rana, Reza Aramesh |

46, 47 | 2008 | *70x7 The Meal Act XXVIII*, Villa Ephrussi de Rothschild | Royal Limoges porcelain plate, three-colour enamel, edition of 100 plates, dated and signed by the artists | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta |

48 | 2008 | *70x7 The Meal Act XXIX*, La Venaria Reale, Torino | Royal Limoges porcelain plate, four-colour enamel, edition of 150 plates, dated and signed by artists | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta |



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49 | 2009 | *70x7 The Meal Act XXX*, Villa Caldogno, Italia | Royal Limoges porcelain plate, offset enamel, edition of 100 plates, dated and signed by Lucy+Jorge Orta | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta and Galleria Continua |

50 | 2009 | *70x7 The Meal Act XXX*, Villa Caldogno, Italia | Royal Limoges porcelain plate, offset enamel, edition of 100 plates, dated and signed by Antony Gormley | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta and Galleria Continua |

51 | 2009 | *70x7 The Meal Act XXX*, Villa Caldogno, Italia | Royal Limoges porcelain plate, offset enamel, edition of 100 plates, dated and signed by Pascale Marthine Tayou | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta and Galleria Continua |

52 | 2010 | *70x7 The Meal Act XXXI*, Natural History Museum, London | Royal Limoges porcelain plate, enamel and platinum, unique piece dated and signed by artists | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta |

53, 54 | 2011 | *70x7 The Meal Act XXXII*, MAXXI Museo Nazionale delle Arti del XXI Secolo, Rome | Royal Limoges porcelain plate, seven-colour enamel, edition of 150 plates, dated and signed by artists | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta and Fondazione Umberto Veronesi |

55, 56 | 2012 | *70x7 The Meal Act XXXIII*, Smiths Row, Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk | Royal Limoges porcelain plate, enamel and platinum, edition of 150 plates, dated and signed by the artists | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta and Smiths Row |

57, 58 | 2013 | *70x7 The Meal Act XXXIV*, Philadelphia | Royal Limoges porcelain plate, enamel and platinum, editions of 600 plates, dated and signed by the artists | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of the artists and Mural Arts, Philadelphia, USA |

59, 60 | 2013 | *70x7 The Meal Act XXXV*, Yorkshire Sculpture Park | Royal Limoges porcelain plate, enamel and platinum, edition of fifty plates, dated and signed by the artists | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta and Yorkshire Sculpture Park |

61, 62 | 2014 | *70x7 The Meal Act XXXVI*, Le Havre | Royal Limoges porcelain plate, enamel and platinum, edition of 175 plates, dated and signed by the artists | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta and LH Forum |

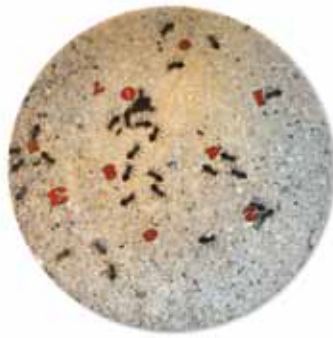
63–72 | 2015 | *70x7 The Meal Act XXXVII*, Milan | Royal Limoges porcelain plate, enamel and platinum, edition of fifty plates, dated and signed by artists | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta and Fondazione Zegna |



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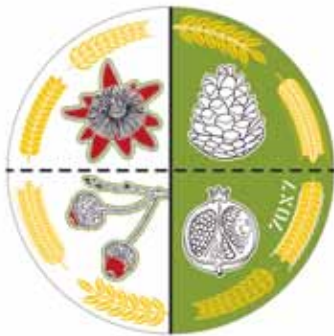


73 | 2015 | *70x7 The Meal Act XXXVIII*, Leiden | Royal Limoges porcelain plate, enamel and platinum, edition of 100, dated and signed by the artists | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta |

74, 75 | 2015 | *70x7 The Meal Act XXXIX*, Peterborough | Royal Limoges porcelain plate, enamel and gold, edition of 250 plates, dated and signed by the artists | 27 cm diameter | Courtesy of Lucy+Jorge Orta |



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76 | 2012 | *70x7 The Meal Act XXXIII—tug at any one thing and the rest will move* | Silk and metal thread jacquard table runner, edition of five | 70x210 cm |



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77 | 2015 | *70x7 The Meal Act XXXVIII, Global Imaginations* | Silk and metal thread jacquard table runner, edition of five | 70x210 cm |



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78 | 2015 | *70x7 The Meal Act XXXIX, Harvest* | Silk and metal thread jacquard table runner, edition of five | 70x210 cm |



78



# FOOD SERVICE

SETTING THE TABLE WITH LUCY + JORGE ORTA

Imagine a plain white dinner plate. Printed on the edge is the simple icon of a Red Cross ambulance. If you flip over the plate, searching for a clue or explanation, you will find a full-colour press photo showing a scene of displacement, famine, or poverty. One is a portrait of African refugees, their arms burdened with empty water jugs. A thin red crosshair cuts through the image.

The ambulance plate is from a set of seven, produced in an edition of thirty-five in 2002 by Lucy + Jorge Orta for *70x7 The Meal*, a series of large group dinners held in public places around the world. The setting, guest list, menu and plates change from meal to meal, but key elements link the dinners into an ongoing endeavour. Each meal is served on special dishes, some conceived for the event and some borrowed from previous gatherings. A custom-printed fabric runner unifies the banquet tables with a ribbon of colour, stretching for hundreds of metres through a cityscape, around a monument, or inside a gallery. Servers wear lime-green, screen-printed aprons. Seven guests invite seven other guests, the group multiplying to populate the scene with people from different social groups: artists, politicians, patrons, farmers, activists and neighbours. The printed pieces—plates, aprons, table covers—anchor the occasion around a layered language of images and objects. The art lies in the social gathering, pinned into memory by artefacts designed for functions both poetic and mundane.

As a design critic and curator, I am drawn to the collision of ordinary purpose and extraordinary meaning in the work of Lucy + Jorge Orta. In project after project, useful objects mix and propagate to create dynamic assemblies of people, places and things. Each project channels energy from familiar objects to fuel social experience, trading up the currency of familiarity to change the way we look at everyday life processes.

How does an apron function? At its most basic level, it shields the wearer, protecting the clothes worn underneath. As a social symbol, the apron serves as a uniform, a badge of duty that conveys status and responsibility. It is a unifying mark that ties one event to others.

How does a tablecloth function? Like an apron, its practical purpose is to conceal and protect. Symbolically, it cloaks a plain surface with the trappings of ceremony. At a large group function, it connects a legion of separate tables, unifying space with colour, turning many into one.

How does a plate function? Again, like the apron and the tablecloth, it is a membrane of separation between the clean and the unclean. It cradles and divides, protecting the food it holds from the surface underneath. It marks a personal space, distancing people while bringing them together with a shared pattern. A plate conveys messages and meaning using shape, materials and ornament to speak about taste, history and custom.

A well-dressed table elevates the status of any occasion, changing how people behave and what they will remember. Table settings transform eating into dining, an orchestrated social ritual. Amplifying the familiar signifiers of decorum, Lucy + Jorge Orta strive to set the table with unexpected intensity. Aprons and runners become banners or flags, vivid beacons that lead the charge rather than holding back in servitude. Dinner plates arrive laden with semiotic abundance: text, diagrams, icons and voluptuous drawings of hearts and artichokes, symbols of human aspiration that speak to the difficulty, says Lucy, of “reaching the centre”.



## LEFTOVERS

Lucy Orta started experimenting with food service in her 1997 project *All in One Basket*, for which she gathered discarded produce from Paris street markets to make into pickles and jams. At the end of each market day, vendors throw damaged, unsold fruits and vegetables into the gutters, where they are washed away as refuse. Orta began collecting and preserving this condemned produce, packing her home-brewed concoctions in glass jars labelled with the food’s urban provenance. She displayed these reclaimed foodstuffs in various ways, including in simple wooden boxes lined with dramatic photographs of abundance and waste. In another piece, she used a single eight-foot-long shelf to organise a row of jars into a linear record of the seasons, from cherries in May to eggplants in November.

Seeking to engage audiences more directly, Orta invited a famous Parisian pâtissier, Stohrer, to create jams and purées to share with the public. The project was hosted in 1997 by a small gallery located in a church near Les Halles, formerly the site of a major fruit and vegetable market, now a shopping mall. While the public sampled the reclaimed food products out on the street, the gallery displayed boxed reliquaries and mobile pantries equipped with audio recordings of gleaners Orta had met on the street. Most of these gleaners were poor, while some were students and others were people who simply stopped to pick up food off the ground. Some homeless people dismissed the practice altogether, explaining that gleanings are only for those rich enough to have a refrigerator and a place to keep their found provisions.

Wasted food is hardly unique to Paris. Grocers and street vendors in prosperous societies around the world routinely discard milk, bread, produce and other foods that are deemed unfit for sale or simply in over-supply. Sellers commonly pulp or contaminate unsold food, destroying it lest it diminish demand for fresher goods. Saving food for those too poor to shop requires a system for collection and distribution—it takes effort to recover value from a bruised apple or a redundant cucumber. The city of Munich provides bins to help vendors salvage and sort refuse, while New York’s City Harvest, a private organisation, delivers food from restaurants to shelters and soup kitchens. For *HortiRecycling*, a project in Vienna, Lucy Orta provided market vendors with brightly coloured, screen-printed totes, which served as handy food-recycling receptacles for the vendors while advertising the process as it took place. Lucy and Jorge created mobile kitchens out of shopping carts and utilitarian hardware elements that enabled them to collect, clean and cook food right on the street when hooked up to water and electricity in the marketplace.

## TRIGGER OBJECTS

As in many Studio Orta projects, *HortiRecycling* and *All in One Basket* yielded a variety of constructed objects—rolling carts, mobile kitchens and shelves stocked with preserved vegetables—as well as live social engagements. Primitive kitchens appear in other Orta projects as well, including *Antarctica*, an ambitious expedition that used the accoutrements of Antarctic exploration to speak of rootless existence in a not-yet-sovereign territory. *Antarctica* includes a series of parachutes laden with emergency supplies, including a floating kitchen that bears clattering clumps of cooking utensils.

Such physical objects concretise the Ortas’ social activities, serving as physical repositories of events. Each object provides an additional way for people to engage in the process of the work, whether viewing it in a gallery or purchasing it to take home. While larger-scale objects play a role in the collectors’ market and the museum world, Lucy + Jorge Orta’s smaller items are affordable to people who might not otherwise purchase a work of contemporary art. A dinner plate or a jar of pickles offers a lasting memento of an event intended to change perceptions of everyday activities (eating, dining, cooking, shopping).

These simple objects resemble everyday things with everyday functions, while the more elaborate constructions (tents, garments, life jackets, architectural structures) often have little or no real utility, employing forms and materials in excess of what might be needed to complete a task. In an interview with Lucy Orta, curator Nicolas Bourriaud suggested the term ‘functioning aesthetics’ to describe the studio’s work, but she interjected the phrase ‘operational aesthetics’ instead. The French word ‘*fonctionnel*’ is equivalent to the English word ‘functioning’, thus bearing connotations of blunt instrumentality and lacking any dimension of poetic surplus and cultural critique. The Ortas began using the word ‘operational’ in connection with their ongoing project *OPERATION Life Nexus*, an endeavour that uses workshops and large-scale projects to raise awareness of organ donation around the world. ‘Opera’ suggests a larger collaboration with curators, scientists, technical experts and others. ‘Operation’ suggests an open process, perhaps with unknown results—a sequence of possible actions rather than a solution to a given problem.

### ELLEN LUPTON

Lucy Orta is often asked if she is a designer. Her answer, insistently, is no. And yet the studio’s methodology bears strong affinities with design practice, and Orta is no stranger to the profession. She trained as a fashion designer at Nottingham Trent University and worked professionally in Paris for more than a decade, specialising in knitwear for men. Jorge Orta studied simultaneously at the Faculty of Fine Arts (1972–1979) and the Faculty of Architecture (1973–1980) of the Universidad Nacional de Rosario in Argentina. Many of the Ortas’ project drawings resemble design drawings, with detailed instructions to be executed by a fabricator, complete with measurements and material samples.

Despite Lucy’s strenuous disavowal of the field today, she is a model and inspiration for many designers. She is professor of Art, Fashion and the Environment at the London College of Fashion, University of the Arts London, and her work has been featured in numerous volumes on experimental fashion. From 2002 to 2005 she was head of the Man & Humanity master’s course at the Design Academy in Eindhoven, where her colleagues included Hella Jongerius and other leading designers. Jongerius, whose projects range from stitched ceramics and soft silicone vases to factory-made dinner plates with built-in flaws and irregularities, seeks to upend expectations about how materials behave. While Jongerius focuses on the physicality of material goods, the Ortas address their social effects. The objects are not ends in themselves, but rather ‘trigger objects’ designed to function as social catalysts, moving people to think and act in new ways about familiar processes. While Jongerius puzzles over the sculptural form of a dinner plate, the Ortas treat their dishes as generic blanks. The basic plate form selected for the ongoing *70x7* project has no articulated rim, offering up a seamless ground for text and image. As physical objects the plates are elegant but interchangeable; variations result from context and conversation, food and message.

Studio Orta is sometimes identified with ‘relational aesthetics’, a term coined by Bourriaud to describe anti-monumental art practices based in everyday social activities. A key figure for Bourriaud is Rirkrit Tiravanija, who began cooking and serving Thai food inside gallery spaces in the early 1990s, as well as Gordon Matta-Clark, who founded the restaurant FOOD in 1971. Matta-Clark’s legendary meals included *Bones*, a repast consisting of frogs’ legs, oxtail soup and roasted marrow bones. Such works emphasise art’s capacity as a publicly consumed, socially shared experience. Studio Orta takes that experience out of the gallery and onto the street (or into the canal, the prison, the natural history museum, or the frozen landscape of Antarctica). The first *70x7* meal took place in the French town of Dieuze in 2000. A local youth centre wanted to bring together people from the town and asked Lucy + Jorge Orta to participate. A tablecloth, screen-printed by hand in the artists’ studio on long rolls of nylon fabric, snaked through the town, tying together dozens of tables into one vast communal picnic. The event was advertised via newspaper to the village’s 3,000 residents, and streets were closed to traffic. All guests received tickets entitling them to buy their own dinner plates if desired. Although the organisers initially objected to the idea of using and selling real china dishes (too expensive, too difficult), more than 750 plates were sold, attesting to the enthusiasm of the guests and their eagerness to hold on to the experience.

Since then, each meal has pursued its own social and culinary agenda.

One event focused on foraging featured panna cotta made with algae as a thickening agent as well as a variety of roots and greens gathered from local fields and forests. A dinner held in collaboration with Italy’s Fondazione Slow Food focused on the plight of the Andean potato, a threatened staple of Argentina’s local economy. Staged in the restored Venaria Reale, a regal palace in Turin, the event featured tables piled with carrots, potatoes, peppers, garlic, celery, courgette and more. During the dinner, a team of cooks cut and trimmed the vegetables, packing bags for guests to carry home and make into their own soup.

The most spectacular dinner in the series has been planned and visualised but not yet held: spanning London’s Millennium Bridge, the dinner would cross the Thames with a continuous, red-clothed dinner table, linking two halves of the city via a shared meal. After breaching the river, the tables would meander through other public areas, seating upwards of 5,000 guests. Commissioned by ixia, a public art think tank in the United Kingdom, the project exists through written plans and carefully simulated photomontages, published in book form as a kind of model or manual for how to conceive and execute a large-scale urban art project.

## A SEASONAL PRACTICE

While the London dinner party remains, for now, a virtual proposal, most Studio Orta projects are resolutely concrete. The couple’s artistic enterprise revolves around a hands-on studio life. In contrast, many artists today work primarily from their computers, arranging the fabrication of pieces via phone and email and relying heavily on galleries to store their work and look after the details of shipping and installation. Although the Ortas’ pieces are fabricated in part by specialists in metalwork, porcelain manufacture, and tent-making, most pieces are finished by hand in their studio spaces, which include a reclaimed dairy in the Brie region east of Paris and a small building near their home in the city.



The dairy, built in the late 1900s as one of the first industrial dairies in France, is now the site of a new kind of industry. It serves as a shipping dock, storage unit and screen-printing workshop, as well as the site for woodworking, plaster casting, painting and assembling. One small room in the dairy is stocked with box after box of carefully labelled plates from the dinner series, available for purchase by collectors or for use in future 70x7 meals where funds aren't available to produce custom plates. The Ortas are also leading the development of a pair of former paper mills—Moulin de Boissy and Moulin Sainte-Marie, located 3 kilometres from the dairy—into a state-of-the-art network of galleries, artist studios, a research centre, and public parks, giving this rural community a new identity and revived economic opportunities. Meanwhile, the unheated dairy has minimal amenities, making it usable only in warm weather. Thus the Ortas write, draw and think in the winter and build, print and assemble in the summer, working with a team of assistants who come and go as the weather changes. Following an intense cycle keyed to the seasons, Studio Orta is a family-run farm whose produce happens to be contemporary art.

The Ortas' public dinners and experimental kitchens coincide with a renewed worldwide interest in the politics of food. Communities around the world—working from the scale of global food networks down to local methods for farming and cooking—are seeking ways to make the food system better serve the needs of people and the planet. After decades of success in the production of massive quantities of cheap food, policymakers and citizens are recognising the environmental and social cost of this process. The over-industrialisation of food has forced small farms to surrender to agribusiness, reduced biodiversity in favour of monoculture crops and assaulted communities with debilitating chronic diseases. Studio Orta illuminates issues of scarcity and waste while drawing people into a reflective experience of eating, drinking, cooking and dining. The experience is a collective one, engaging individuals in a public process.

BIOGRAPHY

Ellen Lupton is a writer, curator and graphic designer.

She is director of the Graphic Design MFA program at Maryland Institute College of Art (MICA) in Baltimore, where she also serves as director of the Center for Design Thinking. As Curator of Contemporary Design at Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum since 1992, she has produced numerous exhibitions and books, including *Mechanical Brides: Women and Machines from Home to Office* (1993), *Letters from the Avant-Garde* (1996), *Mixing Messages: Graphic Design and Contemporary Culture* (1996) and *Skin: Surface, Substance + Design* (2002).

Her book *Thinking with Type* (2004) is used by students, designers and educators worldwide. *D.I.Y.: Design It Yourself* (2006), co-authored with her graduate students at MICA, explains design processes to a general audience. *D.I.Y. Kids* (2007), co-authored with Julia Lupton, is a design book for children illustrated with children's art. The Lupton twins' latest book is *Design Your Life: The Pleasures and Perils of Everyday Things* (2009).

Other books include *Graphic Design: The New Basics* (with Jennifer Cole Phillips, 2008) and *Indie Publishing: How to Design and Produce Your Own Book* (2008). She is the co-author with Abbott Miller of several books, including *The Bathroom, the Kitchen, and the Aesthetics of Waste* (1992), *Design Writing Research* (1996) and *Swarm* (2006).

Lupton is a 2007 recipient of the AIGA Gold Medal, one of the highest honours given to a graphic designer or design educator in the US. She has contributed to various publications, including *Print, Eye, I.D.* and *Metropolis*. She has published essays and illustrations in *The New York Times*. A frequent lecturer around the US and the world, Lupton will speak about design to anyone who will listen.

Other exhibitions she has curated and co-curated include the National Design Triennial series (2000, 2003, 2006, 2010), Feeding Desire: Design and the Tools of the Table, 1500–2005 (2006), Solos: New Design from Israel (2006) and Graphic Design in the Mechanical Age (1999), all at Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum.



# BIOGRAPHY

**LUCY ORTA (B. SUTTON COLDFIELD, UK, 1966)**  
**JORGE ORTA (B. ROSARIO, ARGENTINA, 1953)**

Lucy + Jorge Orta's collaborative practice focuses on social and ecological issues, employing a diversity of media—drawing, sculpture, installation, couture, painting, silkscreen, photography, video, light and performance—to realise major bodies of work. Amongst their most emblematic series are: *Refuge Wear/ Body Architecture*—portable minimum habitats bridging architecture and dress; *HortiRecycling/ 70x7 The Meal*—the local and global food chain and the ritual of community dining; *Nexus Architecture*—alternative modes of establishing the social link; *The Gift*—a metaphor for the heart and the biomedical ethics of organ donation; *OrtaWater/ Clouds*—water scarcity and the problems arising from pollution and corporate control; *Antarctica*—the urgent need to consider the dignity of people suffering as a consequence of climate change; and *Amazonia*—the value of the natural environment to our daily lives and to our survival.

In recognition of their contribution to sustainability, the artists received the Green Leaf Award in 2007 for artistic excellence with an environmental message, presented by the United Nations Environment Programme in partnership with the Natural World Museum at the Nobel Peace Center in Oslo, Norway. In 2013 the artists' monumental *Meteoros* was selected for the inaugural Terrace Wires public art commission for St Pancras International in London.

The Ortas' artwork has been the focus of important survey exhibitions, including: The Curve, Barbican Art Gallery, London (2005); Fondazione Bevilacqua La Masa, Venice Biennale (2005); Museum Boijmans Van Beuningen, Rotterdam (2006); Biennial of the End of the World, Ushuaia, Antarctic Peninsula (2007); HangarBicocca, Milan (2008); Natural History Museum, London (2010); MAXXI National Museum of XXI Century Arts, Rome and Shanghai Biennale (2012); Yorkshire Sculpture Park (2013); Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, Ithaca and Parc de la Villette, Paris (2014); Museum London, Ontario (2015); Peterborough Art Museum (2016).

Lucy + Jorge Orta's studios are located in London, Paris and Les Moulins, a cultural complex founded by the artists along an 8-kilometre stretch of the Grand Morin valley in Seine-et-Marne. Les Moulins acts as an extension of their practice to establish a collective environment dedicated to artistic research and production of contemporary art, informed by the natural environment and the industrial heritage, in particular the former mills and paper production that once occupied the valley. The historical factories of Moulin Sainte-Marie, Moulin de Boissy, Moulin La Vacherie and La Laiterie are undergoing redevelopment to become artist studios, workshops, residencies, exhibition and performance spaces, and a 20-hectare sculpture park.



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Metal

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